

CHILD-SAVING WORK IN BALTIMORE

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THE interest shown by the nurses at the Congress in Buffalo in Mrs. von Wagner's paper, in which she showed what her training as a nurse had enabled her to do as a tenement inspector in Yonkers, and the knowledge that many nurses are branching out into work connected with the various charity organizations, makes one feel that perhaps an account of the work that has become so interesting to the writer, and which cannot help but come near to the hearts of all of us, might not be out of place in our JOURNAL.

The Henry Watson Children's Aid Society of Baltimore takes as its motto the words of Phillips Brooks, "He who helps a child helps humanity, with a distinctness which no other help given to human creatures can possibly give."

The aim of the society is to try to improve the condition of each child within its home, to prevent the separation of families as far as is consistent with the welfare of the children, and to give to each child that has to be taken from its natural home real family life.

The means that are used to accomplish these ends are, first, the home libraries; second, the reception-house in the city; third, and most important of all, the close personal touch of our agents and of our thirty volunteer workers, and the love and care of the three hundred and forty-seven families in which our children are placed.

We work in close coöperation with the Charity Organization Society. Many of the families of children whom we are able to influence come to us through it, and many of our "home library" visitors are "friendly visitors" for the Charity Organization as well.

A family is reported to the Charity Organization Society as being in need, out of work, and without clothes for the children to wear to school. Their agent visits the family, brings to bear upon it all the natural agencies that can assist it back to normal life, and if there are a number of children connected with it who need an outside influence, reports it to the Children's Aid Society.

They either say, "We have a visitor who is much interested in this family. Will you supply them with a case of books?" or, "Here is a family in need of encouragement and good influence. Can you suggest anything for them?"

We then try to find a woman, and we hope after awhile to find men

as well, who is so filled with a true love of humanity that she is willing to go, week after week, perhaps for years, to that family, become a friend to them, sympathize with them in their sorrows, rejoice with them in their joys, and through it all use her influence for good. In order to do this naturally, permission is asked of the mother to bring a case of books to her house. This is usually gladly given, and we send a case of twenty books, carefully chosen for children. The visitor teaches the children how to care for them, makes the most responsible child librarian, reads to them, and gets them thoroughly interested in good literature. After a while, when she thinks the time has come, she gets the mother to invite in some of the friends of her children, and a library group of ten is formed. You can imagine the possibilities for a woman thoroughly in earnest. When the twenty books are read, word is sent to us and we exchange them for twenty more. At our monthly meeting many of the visitors report, not only the children, but the father and mother as reading every one of the books, and many times the over-tired mother, with no time to plan amusements for her children, sends word to us of her appreciation of the books, and tells how her boys stay in to read and how the children enjoy the games taught by the visitor. Clean hands and aprons, tidy rooms and regularity at school, show the influence of the books and of the visitor.

If it is impossible for the family to be kept together,—the father or mother may have died, or, worse than that, may have become so immoral that the home is not a fit place for the children,—their nearest friends may bring them to us and we accept them as our wards.

If the parents are unwilling to give up the children, but can be proven unfit to care for them, the Society for the Protection of Children may take the case before the Juvenile Court and have the children committed by law to us.

We first take them to our reception-house on Linden Avenue. There we have as matron a woman who has had experience as a teacher, and was for six months housekeeper at the Nurses' Settlement at 265 Henry Street, New York. Any of us who know anything of the life there know that no one could spend that length of time in that atmosphere and not be filled with a love for humanity and an overwhelming desire to start the children right. We keep the children at "Linden House" until we know them and know the kind of a home they are suited for. Some of them need to go to the hospitals for treatment, all need to be clothed and fitted out for country life.

We have applications for children from all kinds of people, with all kinds of motives. No doubt the motive that actuates the most of them is a love of humanity and a desire to care for and train a neglected



THREE OF OUR CHILDREN



HOMES FROM WHICH OUR CHILDREN COME



TWO OF OUR GIRLS



ONE OF OUR COUNTRY HOMES

child, but the servant problem is a serious one in Maryland as well as in other places, and many times the people want the children for the use they can make of them.

Again, even if the child is taken with the very best motive, conditions change in the family, or some member of the family succeeds in making life miserable for our child. The school problem too is a serious one, there being no compulsory education laws, except in Baltimore City and Allegany County, and many of the people in the country being quite satisfied to send their own children for only a few months each year. Therefore one can readily see not only how much thought it takes to place the children, but also what watchfulness is required afterwards to see that they are well placed and rightly cared for. We have regular agents who visit the children twice a year in their country homes, correspondence is encouraged between the children, the foster-parents, and the secretary, and we try to have reports from the pastors and teachers twice a year. Even then we many times make mistakes and are grieved to think of what might have been if only we had done differently.

However, it is a most encouraging work, and many of our children live on in their adopted homes in the country after they are free to leave them (eighteen years of age), marry there, and become a part of the community. Some of them come back to town, go to their old associations, and soon leave disgusted—they have become accustomed to better and purer things; and some, on the other hand, may return to town, do well here, and become useful laboring men and women, caring perhaps for the mother who was obliged to give them up when children. Again let me use the words of Phillips Brooks, printed each year at the beginning of our report: "Anything that touches the life of children, that deals with the beginning of life, cannot help being hopeful. It is as if you should drop something into the fountain which should rush on in the stream and go into the fields and make them richer. It is a joy to do something which shall not merely touch the present, but shall reach forward to the future."

